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ABSTRACT

This paper highlights a new approach to the topic of language consciousness. Although a good deal has already been learned about the topic in connection with such questions as: "When and among whom does language consciousness arise?"; "When is it stronger and when is it weaker?"; and "What does it lead its adherents to do on behalf of their own beloved language and in opposition to completing language?" one element has been missing, namely, an approach that would enable scholars to capture and appreciate the world view, the belief system, and the emotional motivational readiness for overt behavior that language so often entails. The paper discusses the tendency of ethnic and national groups to cultivate and advocate "my" language over all others in terms of the focus on the internal emotional and historical resources of a given culture. (AB)

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In praise of my language

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This is the text of a talk presented at the 1992 Nessa Wolfson Memorial Colloquium at the University of Pennsylvania.

Language consciousness is by no means a new topic within the sociolinguistic enterprise, and certainly not within the social science enterprise as a whole. I first approached this topic in my 1966 *Language Loyalty in the United States* and returned to it again with more international focus in my 1972 *Language and Nationalism*. Both of these books are still in print, 26 and 22 years respectively after their initial publication, and I take that as testimony to their continued usefulness. However, I am now deeply involved in a new approach to this topic, an approach that I think of as more reflective of the manifold *internal* and *cognitive* perspectives surrounding it.

Via a healthy variety of methods and perspectives, we have managed to learn a good deal about language consciousness in connection with questions such as: *When* and *among whom* does such consciousness arise? When is it *stronger* and when is it *weaker*? *What* does it lead its adherents *to do* on behalf of their own beloved language and in opposition to competing languages? Typically, a few ethnocultural cases (often only one case) are studied in detail and over time, frequently via a variety of social science methods (such as survey techniques and ethnographies and even quasi-experiments), in order to answer questions such as the above and, hopefully, to arrive at theoretical formulations pertaining to language consciousness. From studies such as the foregoing we have already learned many things:

Language consciousness is usually a component of ethnic consciousness more generally. Like the latter, it is not always *in* consciousness–although, once developed, it is very easily elicited and further cultivated. The leaders and would-be leaders of ethnocultural aggregates play a major role in the cultivation of such consciousness,

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although they commonly utilize and heighten previously available (and widely recognized and implemented) motifs from folksongs, folktales, proverbs and ethnomoral texts and traditions as the building blocks of such consciousness, together with newly created imagery as well. Language consciousness waxes and wanes in intensity, the waxing coinciding with periods of stress and challenge, when common symbols are called upon to mobilize clienteles on behalf of proffered solutions to current problems. As the major symbol system of our species, particular languages naturally become symbolic of their respective speakers and of such language-encumbered verities as their respective histories, values, laws, lore, liturgies, customs and even their physical beings per se. Indeed, language consciousness is not merely a derivative of the common *symbolic* link between language and culture, but it is also an outgrowth of the fact that much of culture is itself linguistic and does not or cannot exist other than via a specific, traditionally-associated language.

As a result of the foregoing longstanding and interdependent association between languages and their traditional ethnocultures, languages are intricately related to the rivalries and altercations between ethnocultures. Once language consciousness has been widely developed (and intercultural rivalries cause such consciousness to spread quickly from urban intellectuals and proto-elites to all other segments of the population), it may recede in intensity and in salience, but it is rarely lost altogether. Even immigrant populations, often lacking in intellectual resources and most commonly lacking in resources for legal redress against economic, political and cultural discrimination, are long characterized by language consciousness and language advocacy within specific sub-networks of teachers, writers, clerics and community activists. The ethnic revival of the mid-70's was one such recent occasion of increased immigrant language conscious in the USA and in the Western world more generally. Since then, the mainstream reward system has become a dominant concern again and few immigrant cultures anywhere have been able to develop the diglossic arrangements that would permit participation in mainstream econopolitical processes, on the one hand, and the fostering of their own language and culture maintenance, on the other hand. For a variety of reasons (see Fishman 1991), such arrangements are difficult to attain and maintain even for indigenous ethnolinguistic minorities.

The Internal View

Notwithstanding all that prior inquiry has already enabled us to understand about ethnolinguistic consciousness, there is one approach that I find missing in this area of study, namely an approach that would enable us to capture and appreciate the *worldview*, the belief system, and the emotional or motivational readiness for overt behavior that language consciousness so frequently entails. *Consciousness* and *identity*–and even *belief*–can all be passive states, but in connection with language (and with ethnicity more generally) we are all aware that actions frequently follow, actions of support of the beloved language and actions in opposition to the rejected one (or ones). Both support and opposition can take on various forms and intensities, many of which clearly reveal that language consciousness can also be a powerful factor in the world of goal-directed social behavior. Thus, the internal view also has external consequences, some of them of an intra-group and others of them of an inter-group nature. Accordingly, it is all the more important for us to know exactly what is included within the total attitude-belief-action system which language consciousness incorporates.

Why have we not looked much at this area of inquiry before? Perhaps because some of us tend to move too quickly toward the abstract. Those who do, find it simple to subsume the internalized content of language consciousness within the externalized study of ideologies and elites, of political organization and intergroup tensions. However, this cannot be the entire reason, since many who have studied ethnolinguistic consciousness have guarded against reaching for abstractions prematurely. Perhaps part of the problem is that self-concepts are always difficult to study. They are so personal, private and even fragile that the very act of inquiry tends to change them or influence them in the very act of studying them. However, there is yet another reason I think–that many Western researchers (and sociocultural and ethnolinguistic research are both still very largely Western luxuries) are consciously or unconsciously negative toward particularistic ethnolinguistic views and loyalties. This negativism derives from the universalistic bias of the social sciences, on the one hand, and from roughly two centuries of right-wing capitalist and left-wing socialist thought, on the other hand. Accordingly, much social science interest gravitates either toward examining (and praising) the dissolution of parochialism or toward examining (and condemning) its excesses. Given my own background and my own studies, I would be the last to claim that ethnolinguistic particularism does not have many very negative

features and that there are occasions when we should all be relieved that certain ethnolinguistic manifestations have been transcended. However, these manifestations are only a very small part of the total ethnolinguistic identity and ethnolinguistic consciousness pie. As with every other sociocultural phenomenon that is investigated, we must try to see it more dispassionately, more fully, more sensitively, more situationally and contextually, not to mention more synchronically, than others are likely to do. The conflictual aberrations pertaining to ethnolinguistic identity and consciousness are not the whole story. Let us also remember that it is very hard to locate any form or basis of aggregative life that is not subject to conflictual aberrations of any kind or at any time whatsoever.

The Data of Language Consciousness

But setting aside the anti-ethnic biases of social researchers and theoreticians is not in itself a solution to the problem of how to study ethnolinguistic awareness. There are a variety of methodologies available and they will differ not only in their empirical operations but also in the degree to which individual researchers have an affinity for them and, finally, in the kind of data that they will yield. When I decided to study the cognitive content or mind-set of ethnolinguistic consciousness, I could have decided to do an ethnography of a network of language activists that I have long been aware of informally, or to do in-depth interviews of its members (individually or in small groups), or to do a survey of the larger organization of which the network is a part, or even to do a world wide study of various important quantitative characteristics of such organizations. Indeed, I may yet do all of the foregoing kinds of studies, but, to begin with, I started, as I frequently do, with the literature. Not just the literature *about* language consciousness but the literature *of* language consciousness per se.

All over the world, and for many, many years, language advocates, defenders, loyalists and activists have spoken out (and written down) their views, feelings and beliefs about "their" language. I am sure that if I went back to ancient times I would find some such statements there too: among the ancient Egyptians and the Chinese, the classical Hebrews and the Greeks, the Romans and the earliest Moslems, the Javanese and the Incas, the Aztecs and the Indic Sanskritists. However, since it is the last century or so that interests me most, I have restricted myself to the latter time period for the time being. I have gathered language advocacy statements by poets and by politicians, by teachers and by journalists, by scholars and by philosophers, by school children and by ordinary men and women. I have gathered such statements

about languages all over the world, so that European languages and non-European languages are both well represented, as are minorities and majorities, immigrant-derived and native-of-native advocates, educated and uneducated, the famous and the unknown (even unknown to their own fellow-speakers). This is the first time I have reported even preliminary findings on this topic, a topic still very much in the process of being investigated and which I have tentatively titled "In Praise of My Language."

The Major Themes

There are a few themes that occur very commonly, across languages, across continents, and across time. There is a much larger number of themes which are rarer, that is to say: more language-specific. Most languages are characterized both on the widely shared and on the more unique themes, that is to say: in some respects they are viewed by their advocates very similarly to the ways in which almost all languages the world-over are viewed; in some ways they are viewed as possessing characteristics that only a certain number of other languages (between a third and a half) are viewed as having; and, finally, in some ways they are viewed in ways that are quite unique to them, and no (or hardly any) others are found who are viewed as possessing those particular characteristics. There is only time, here and now, for a few of these themes to be reviewed, so let us start with some of the most common ones. For the sake of variety, we will set aside Spanish, Afro-American, Jewish, or other examples that are already likely to be well known by some of you and concentrate on examples that may be more novel.

Essentiality of traditionally associated language for ethnocultural identity

The absolute essentiality of the traditionally associated language for ethnocultural identity and continuity is very commonly claimed. Sometimes this is stated in very general terms. The Alsatian claim that their *dialect* provides the "stability," "cultural specificity and uniqueness" to their lives "when all other things collapse," is of this kind {A2}[1], as is the Irish claim that the Irish language provides the "roots of the [Irish} tree {I3}" and the German claim that the "entire people [have built] the magnificent structure of the German language as a mirror image" of themselves {G1}. Non-European images of the identity of language and cultural identity also abound. A Caribbean French Creole example refers to Creole as the vehicle of "self acceptance, linked to our very existence and...authenticity....our collective unconscious [and] deep self {C1}" and a Guarani citation claims that the language is "the index...of the distinctive individuality of Paraguayans {G1}." A Mayan Kaqchikel citation renders

explicit what is implicit in much of the above, namely, that "once a people loses its own language, it loses its identity {MK1}," as does the Sumatran, "Without a language the nation disappears" {I/s1}. Many of the above citations claim that the historically associated language created or fashioned the cultural aggregate and its identity, while others claim exactly the opposite direction of causality, namely, that the language is a product of the people and its historical, spiritual and even physical characteristics. In either case, the "identity" claim delicately serves double semantic duty, implying both "ethnocultural definition" (that is, the language identifies the culture), on the one hand, and "isomorphism of language and ethnoculture" (i.e., the language and the culture are indivisibly one and the same), on the other hand.

A Basque citation sums up the latter view as follows: "[E]veryone who is *eskaldun* [ethnically Basque] must be Basque in language in order to deserve the name *eskaldun* {B1}." Basque is only one of several languages in which members of the ethnocultural collectivity are designated by a term which *necessarily* signifies being speakers of the normally associated ethnocultural tongue, i.e., speaking the historically associated ethnocultural language is *the* way in which membership is designated, indicated, and confirmed. The Romansch slogan, "Tanter rumanschs be rumanschs!" [=Among the Romansch, nothing but Romansch {R1}], also reveals this same lexico-cognitive equivalence, even when it is manifestly counter-factual. The typological reformulation that has been fostered in centers of mass immigration (Non-Spanish-speaking Hispanics, non-Yidddish-speaking Eastern European derived Jews, non-Italian-speaking Italo-Americans) is simply not acceptable everywhere in the world and the greater longevity of putative ethnocultural identity in comparison to language use would be considered an instance of "the operation was successful but the patient died," i.e., a totally unacceptable outcome.

Nation and Language

The same thematic category, or one so closely associated with it that it may not pay to differentiate the two, invokes the term *nation* in connection with language and identity claims. "Nation" is also a term that does double semantic duty, particularly in (American) English. On the one hand, *nation* implies *nationality*, i.e., an ethnocultural attachment. On the other hand, *nation* implies *polity*, i.e., an ethnopolitical attachment (such as in "...one nation, under God, with liberty and justice for all"). In either case, it implies a more salient or conscious attachment than does [Irish] tree, [German] stream, [Creole] collective unconscious, or even [Mayan] people, although frequently the latter, people, is used as synonymous with either "nation" or "nationality."

From Flanders comes the claim that Flemings and Dutchmen are "indeed the same nation" because they are "identical in language, character and costumes {D1}." From Finland, we learn that "[Its] language is any nations most precious possession, with which...it is born, grows [up] and disappears from the earth {F1}." A Polish citation claims that "As long as there is the [Polish] language there is also the Polish people {P1}." A Serbian example reveals another European setting in which "people" is used with strong implications of language consciousness: "As long as our language lives, as long as we love it and respect it, speak it and write it and purify it, augment it and beautify it, so long shall the Serbian people live too {S2}." Note the clearly specified *action responsibilities* which this citation specifies for those who aspire to be good Serbian patriots. We will return to action responsibilities in a moment.

The nation's dependence upon (and/or contribution to) its long and authentically associated language is also clearly evinced outside of Europe. A famous Philippine spokesperson opines that "Until we have that [=a nationwide Philippine language] we shall not be a people {Ph2}." A Quechua example is equally insistent: "In its [the Quecha people's] language one finds all of its greatness {Q2}." Similar claims are made for Hindi, Swahili, and Indonesian.

Status Planning

The obligation to engage in status planning (i.e., to advocate, propagate, protect and societally elevate the historically validated language) is a natural outgrowth of the conviction that language and ethnocultural/ ethnonational existence are inextricably linked (and, indeed, even identical desiderata). Status planning goals are exemplified by statements such as for Arabic in the Magreb:

> [Our goal must be] instruction and writing at all levels, science, math (not just poetry and literature), all levels of government and econotechnical administration. Only a language of administration can be worthy of being maintained as a language of modern cultured thought {A1}.

For Hausa the proud claim is made that "It is also employed by the mass media and by poets and performing artists {H2}." Maori advocates aspire to the time when "new ideas, thoughts and experiences [will] be expressed in and committed to the Maori language; otherwise our language will become dead and static {M1}." Similarly, the Philippine leadership commits itself "to take such steps as are necessary for the purpose of using Filipino...in official transactions, communications and correspondence {Ph3}." Literally identical "modern" status goals are now being expressed on behalf of Byelorussian, Norwegian Nynorsk, Rusyn, and Basque in

Europe, just as they were expressed several centuries ago for English, French, Spanish, German, and Italian. Of course, the utilization of all languages for one and the same set of modern, high-status econotechnical functions leads to endless political, economic and even military confrontations, although the equity of totally denying any such functions to the "latecomers" on various continents (including the European "latecomers", such as Rusyn, or Macedonian) is clearly questionable and can easily be seen as expressions of racist and colonialist/imperialist views.

Corpus Planning

Similarly obligatory in modern terms is the injunction to engage in corpus planning, i.e., to amplify, beautify, modernize, and standardize the language per se. A language which is lexically or orthographically deficient or which has no agreed upon norms for foreignisms and for different genres cannot successfully compete to be adopted for modern, higher econotechnical functions. If French once had to be "render[ed]..... not only elegant but capable of treating all the arts...and sciences (Fr2}," and if English had to defend itself against the charge that it had "foreignisms...more than the bravest tongues do {E2}" and had to be advocated as able "to record almost all the events and discoveries of ancient and modern times {E2}," is there any wonder that Third World latecomers are in even greater need of corpus planning today (when there are already scores of competitor languages that do fulfill many of these functions)? Clearly, when Malay advocates strive toward a "common spelling" as well as "scientific and technical terms {M1}," and Chinese authorities advocate "the simplification of Chinese characters and the promotion of the standard vernacular {C1}," they do so with the conviction that the nation as a whole, rather than just the language per se, will be strengthened and rendered more productive and functionally effective. The total interdependence of status and corpus planning is well exemplified by the Serbian call to "purify it, augment it and beautify it [the Serbian language]....so [that] the [Serbian] nation [may] live."

Some Less Frequent Themes

The foregoing quartet will have to do, for the moment, to indicate just how strongly languages are advocated and cultivated (and, of course, that implies how strongly competing languages aré resisted and deprecated [and there usually are locally competing languages; indeed, the rejection of competitors is another very common theme everywhere]. Some of the less common (but far from uncommon) themes deal with aesthetic qualities of one's own language, the cognitive benefits of

the language for its speakers, the incomparable "inherent" suitability of the language for its traditionally associated culture, the kinship associations that are present in connection with one's own language (thus, the expression "mother tongue," e.g., is not an exceptional term but one of a whole family of terms that encompass all members of the primary family), the implications of freedom and equality that use of one's own language carries with it and fosters, the genius of the language, the religious overtones and memories associated with the language, the language's link to the total and ongoing history of the ethnoculture, the language's link with an honorable past and with a hopeful future, the intergenerational continuity contributions of the language (and, therefore, its assurance of triumph over personal death), life and death imagery more generally, the language's role in connection with attaining literacy and with great literary creativity, the model of the "good language" (e.g., just what is "good Bengali"?), the language's parallels to nature, the rejection of intragroup (i.e., within one's own group) negativity toward the language, bodily imagery in connection with the language, the acquisition of power via the language, resistance to language shift and ethnic assimilation, rurality associations with the language (former and current), language shift problems (ongoing and in the past), memories of childhood associated with the language, the language as the "soul" or "spirit" of the nation, the unity contributions of the language (past and future), the language in the expression and preservation of "national values," and so on and so on.

Then, of course, there are the even more uncommon themes, too numerous to mention now, but, naturally, of great importance in the more specific task of understanding the attachments expressed in connection with any one language or another. There are potentially an endless number of these, if we content-analyze in accord with very refined or narrowly worded categories, but there are still a fairly large number even when an attempt is made to establish somewhat broader and more generally useful categories. All in all, I have found it desirable to establish finer categories initially (in order not to leave out anything that might conceivably turn out to be interesting or important) and then to combine these subsequently, in order to avoid the proliferation of categories. A tentative combination of *ethnic group identity* and n*ational group identity* into a single category (in the discussion of the perceived identity of language and ethnicity, above), is an example of the possible assets and debits pertaining to setting overly broad and overly narrow content boundaries. Boundary problems are endemic, of course, both within and between the social sciences as a whole.

"In Praise of My Language": Good or Bad for Humanity?

A common American posture is to be negative toward most ethnolinguistic identity strivings that may have political and conflictual consequences. There is a widespread feeling that things were probably "better" during the time of the unified USSR and Yugoslavia, when "ethnic cleansing" and "ethnic strife" were held down or presumably non-existent due to the imposition of superior central force. Of course, the latter force led to much bitterly, if more silently, resented Russification and Serbianization, which, to a large extent, are the precursors to the current centrifugal and extra-punitive and even intra-punitive counter-reactions. Ultimately, however, problems such as these do not get settled by sweeping them under the rug. Any study of the cognitive map of ethnolinguistic self-perceptions will reveal as much or more chauvinism among the "greats" as among the "smalls," among the native born as among the immigrants. Only arrangements that lead toward more ethnocultural tolerance and power sharing will ultimately lead to the establishment of a new modus vivendi among super powers and small powers, among early modernizers and late modernizers, among old polities and new ones. In achieving that much desired state of affairs it is absolutely imperative that the "have nots" or "latecomers" be understood, respected and even admired for the fortitude that has maintained them and brought them to their current quest for greater recognition and support for the verities that they hold dear, among them: their languages and the delicate and intricate web of beliefs, attitudes and convictions with which these languages are so richly endowed.

As might be expected, dealing with the ethnolinguistic self-concepts of problematic languages and of languages in problematic circumstances, reveals a high proportion of self-congratulatory and self-centered views. Such views are predictable ingredients of mobilization for collective problem-solving. We should note, however, that not all of the views are characterizable in these terms and that not all of them are xeno- or exo-phobic by any means. Actually, they reveal a focus on the internal emotional and historical resources of the culture, at a time when these resources are being counted upon to help redress perceived disadvantages and misfortunes. Many of these emphases will subsequently be dropped or played down, as the problematic contexts that initially stimulated them recede. On the other hand, other emphases or particular themes may remain permanently salient and even the de-emphasized ones can be returned to consciousness by appeals that are resorted to when troubles reappear. Childhood traumas usually leave some traces which permits their reactivation. Our world is one in which few ethnolinguistic groups have suffered no

traumas and inflicted none themselves. Hopefully, new intra- and international arrangements and organizations will be able to bring about more therapeutic interethnic problem-solving in the future. Spain, Australia and the European Community (the so-called "EC") have already provided several good examples for the world to emulate.

In Closing: The Philadelphia Context of "In Praise of My Language"

Many of the languages represented in my "collection" are now represented within the population of Philadelphia, not to mention such languages as Spanish and Italian and Greek and Polish and Yiddish and Black English with which many of you are already intimately familiar. We have children in the Philadelphia schools who come from homes where they hear views of the kinds that I have mentioned. Their parents go to houses of worship and participate in choruses or choirs and listen to radio and television programs in which the praise of their languages (and the identitites and responsibilities which such praises foster and advocate) are implied, intimated, expressed, assumed, stressed, and re-iterated. If we seek to understand and respect, assist, serve, and honor these children and adults, as well we should, and not only in schools but in hospitals, social service agencies, job-training programs and citizenship training courses, we must become acquainted with the ethnolinguistic longings and leanings which these populations carry with them. More of them will hold and subscribe to the views that I have found and quoted here than you might think. These parents and children do not frequently express these views to us because they think we are not interested, wouldn't understand, and might even criticize or reject them for such views. We must know or suspect the existence of such views in order to encounter them, in order to be able to help others strive to implement them as a permissible part of their identity, and in order to foster the kind of Philadelphia, the kind of Everytown and the kind of USA where such identitites, and the language views that they subsume, are respected and understood.

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[1] The letter-number combinations refer to data in the corpus by language (letter) and informant (number). Thus, all samples with "A" refer to the same language but "A1" and "A2" would refer to two different informants concerning that language.